

What is claimed is:

1. A method of treating a human or animal patient, the method comprising the steps of:

5 providing a catheter device, sized to be placed in an epidural space of a spinal canal of a human or animal patient, the catheter device having a distal region with a pre-formed configuration including at least one curve and a distal tip;

providing the distal region of the catheter device in a substantially straightened configuration;

10 introducing the distal region of the catheter device into a sacral hiatus of a human or animal patient;

advancing, while in a straightened configuration, the distal region of the catheter device anterogradely through the epidural canal from the sacral hiatus to a site
15 adjacent a targeted nerve root; and

positioning the distal tip of the catheter device in proximity to the targeted nerve root by causing the distal region of the catheter device to resume the pre-formed configuration.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of providing the distal region of the catheter device in a substantially straightened configuration includes providing a guidewire within a lumen of the catheter device.

3. The method according to claim 1 wherein the preformed configuration includes a primary curve of at least about 90 degrees.

4. The method according to claim 1 wherein the preformed configuration of the distal region of the catheter device includes a primary curve and a secondary curve.

5. The method according to claim 1 further comprising a step of performing a medical procedure on the targeted nerve root including accessing the targeted nerve root with the distal tip of the catheter device.

6. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of positioning includes buttressing the catheter device against a wall of the spinal canal generally opposing the target nerve root.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of advancing comprises advancing the distal region from the sacral hiatus to at least as far as a L4 vertebra.

8. A method of treating a human or animal patient, comprising:

providing a catheter device, sized to be placed in an epidural space of a spinal canal of a human or animal patient, the catheter device having a distal region with a pre-formed configuration including at least one curve, a distal tip, and a lumen extending from a proximal region of the catheter device to the distal region, the lumen being sized to accommodate a guidewire;

introducing the catheter device into the spinal canal of the patient, the catheter device being introduced while in a relatively straight configuration obtained by having a guidewire located within the lumen;

advancing the catheter device anterogradely along an epidural space of the spinal canal of the patient to a site such that the distal region of the catheter device is disposed adjacent a targeted nerve root; and

positioning the distal tip of the catheter device in proximity to the targeted nerve root by withdrawing the guidewire from the catheter device lumen so that the distal region of the catheter device assumes its pre-formed configuration.

9. The method according to claim 8 wherein the pre-formed configuration includes a primary curve of at least about 90 degrees.

10. The method according to claim 8 wherein the pre-formed configuration of the distal region of the catheter device includes a primary curve and a secondary curve.

11. The method according to claim 8 further comprising a step of introducing an active agent from the distal tip of the catheter device into the targeted nerve root.

12. The method according to claim 8 wherein the step of positioning includes buttressing the catheter device against a wall of the spinal canal generally opposing the targeted nerve root.

13. The method of claim 8 wherein the step of advancing comprises advancing the distal region from the sacral hiatus to at least as far as a L4 vertebra.

14. An apparatus for imaging and/or treating a human or animal patient, the apparatus comprising:

a catheter device structured to be placed in a epidural space of a spinal canal of a human or animal patient, the catheter device including

a distal region having a pre-formed configuration including a primary curve of at least about 90 degrees, the primary curve being selected to facilitate access to a target nerve root within the spinal canal of the patient.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the catheter device further includes a lumen extending from a proximal region of the catheter device to the distal region, the lumen being sized to accommodate a guidewire for straightening the pre-formed curve.

16. The apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the pre-formed configuration of the catheter device includes at least one secondary curve.

17. The apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the apparatus is structured to enable delivery of a medicament to the distal tip of the catheter device.

18. The apparatus of claim 14 further comprising:
a medicament suitable for treating the patient; and
structure for delivering the medicament to the distal region of the catheter device.

19. The apparatus according to claim 14 being structured to deliver radio-opaque dye into the targeted nerve root.

20. The apparatus according to claim 14 being structured to deliver electrical stimulation to the targeted nerve root.

21. The apparatus according to claim 14 being structured to deliver ablation to the targeted nerve root.